



Committee on HOMELAND SECURITY

Chairman Michael McCaul

Opening Statement

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Statement of Chairman Michael McCaul (R-Texas) Committee on Homeland Security

“Crisis in Syria: Implications to Homeland Security”

Remarks as Prepared

For two years, Americans have known that a brutal war is being waged in Syria. The atrocities witnessed almost a month ago shocked the world – and have demanded tough choices from the United States. However, horrific acts should not spur unwise reactions, and we must thoroughly examine the realities of military intervention in this civil war.

Today we gather to examine both the Assad regime and the opposition forces that are caught in a bloody civil war. Specifically, we will look at what role America might play in this deadly conflict and what a military strike against Syria could mean for our national and homeland security.

Yesterday, Syrian President Assad said the U.S. should 'expect everything' in response to military strikes in Syria, and last week, the U.S. intercepted an order from Iran to militants in Iraq to attack the U.S. Embassy in Iraq and other American interests. On the same day, the FBI warned that the possibility of U.S. military action could escalate cyber attacks by pro-Syrian or other aligned cyber actors.

Ultimately, the United States must weigh the ripple effects of its actions. Many Members of Congress have made the point that America's credibility is on the line, while others have maintained that the Administration's wavering response to Assad's brutal tactics over the past year cannot be fixed with an “unbelievably small” military action, as Secretary Kerry described the strikes yesterday.

What America must determine is what its support for either side means, and the consequences for the United States. An “unbelievably small” intervention, as described by the Secretary, could elicit an unbelievably damaging chain of events for the U.S.

Make no mistake, punishing Assad is a noble mission. Based on the briefings we have received, it is conclusive that he used chemical weapons against his own people. But damaging the Regime's command and control posts will have the effect of helping the Rebels. The Assad Regime's decades of

repression have undoubtedly wrought this revolution, but the moderate resistance has been infiltrated with some of the fiercest Islamist fighters in the world.

Our country strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons. They are some of the most egregious methods of warfare known to mankind. The Assad Regime has used them for many months, and has killed many innocent people. American's have great compassion for the victims, however as we look at the Syrian crisis, we must be realistic and take into account the fact that the resistance movement is now dominated - in some regions - by a host of Islamist extremist factions such as al Nusra, an al Qaeda affiliate.

While the Administration contends that we can support the rebels, and differentiate between the moderate and extremist wings, the reality is that they are now working together. Any U.S. military strikes against the Assad Regime will also benefit the extremists fighting him who will undoubtedly use Assad's weapons against American allies and interests and possibly even our homeland if given the chance.

This is all put in unique focus as we observe this week both the anniversaries of the attacks in Benghazi, and those on September 11, 2001. Al Qaeda perpetrated both attacks, and there is serious concern that if Assad falls, the extremist wings of the rebel movement will fill the vacuum and take over Assad's arsenal of chemical weapons. Sadly, in places like Libya and Egypt, we have seen that dictators are rarely replaced by moderates.

This fact is why my main concern has been, and remains, the security of Assad's chemical weapon stockpiles. We have known of his growing arsenal for decades – and the President's strike plan will not secure them. Securing these weapons will take an international coalition, and will ensure that they can neither be used by Assad or the extremist elements of the rebel forces.

Since the strikes will not accomplish this goal and could draw our country in to a prolonged conflict, I remain concerned about the President's widely telegraphed plan.

Today, I hope we can discuss the ripple effects of our action or inaction in the Syrian conflict, and I appreciate the witnesses for sharing their expertise. After years of indecision, the President has sent this decision to Congress, and our deliberation will help shape the way forward.

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